



Committee of Higher Education and Employment Advancement Public Hearing

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Testimony

by

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Good morning Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Kevin Corcoran, Executive Director of the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC), and I am here today to support **HB 6117, An Act Concerning the Use of Digital Open-Source Textbooks in Higher Education.**

CTDLC is a division of Charter Oak State College, under the Board of Regents (BOR) for Higher Education, which serves 17 public institutions in this state. As a division of Charter Oak, the CTDLC is funded through a combination of state appropriations and user fees.

Between 2002 and 2012, the price of a commercial textbook has increased by 82% or about three times the rate of inflation in the same span. According to the College Board, community college students nationally will spend **over \$1,200** per year on textbooks. In reaction to these rising costs, **over 60%** of students will not register for at least one course in their academic experience due to the textbook costs. Even worse, 25% of those students will take the course **without the required materials**. Here in Connecticut, our community college students spend \$175 on average just for General Psychology textbooks. In the 2011-2012 academic year, over 11,000 of these students enrolled in General Psychology, spending an **estimated \$1.9 million** on textbooks alone.

We can combat this problem by supporting Open Education Resources or OER. OER are “teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license (Creative Commons) that permits their free use and re-purposing by others.” OER are not only open-source textbooks, but video lectures, tutorials, and any other type of material that can be used for education including fully developed courses.

Even with a vast number of repositories, each containing tens of thousands of open resources, one major challenge still exists. A Babson study recently revealed that **65% of all faculty** still are not aware that Open Education Resources exist.

The Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium has been very active over the past two years in educating and supporting its member two/four year, public/private institutions across the state on the benefits of Open Education Resources (OER). CTDLC has been the catalyst in the region for OER discussions and has hosted several events on the topic as well as forged a regional collaboration among institutions throughout the Northeast.

Our efforts started in earnest in the spring of 2013 when CTDLC invited nationally recognized experts on open education to participate in a keynote panel discussion during the CTDLC’s annual teaching and learning conference held on June 11, 2013. The event was attended by over 220 educators across New England.



CTDLC then partnered with the **University of Massachusetts Online** consortium and the **Massachusetts Colleges Online** consortium to combine our individual efforts into a regional initiative. The first of these OER summits was held in the fall of 2013 and presented academic leaders with the business rationale behind OER and presented practitioners with the educational impact of OER. The second summit was held in the spring of 2014 and focused on the strategy behind successful implementation of OER, including institutional policy as well as course level objectives.

Following the success of the OER Summits, the Connecticut/Massachusetts partnership expanded to include institutions from New York and New Jersey with **SUNY Empire, Excelsior College, and Thomas Edison State College** joining the collaboration, leading to the creation of the **Northeast OER Consortium**. The newly formed consortium is focused on the development of a centralized training library, models and templates of exemplar OER courses and texts, and a repository of regional course and textbook efforts focused on promoting collaboration.

The Northeast OER Consortium facilitated a recent **NERCOMP** OER workshop held on September 22, 2014, presenting a nationally reviewed Open Road Map document developed by the CTDLC. This group will be participating in an **Open Education Week** event on the campus of UMass-Boston on March 13th as well as delivering a webinar on OER for NERCOMP on April 17th.

In closing, I support HB 6117 and see a natural connection between the legislation and the work already underway. I would like the CTDLC to continue to be a leader in this effort. Additionally, I would like to suggest the focus not only be on the development of new low costs/no cost textbooks, but encourage the adoption and adaption of current OER works as Housatonic Community College recently did. Their Intermediate Algebra OER project is on track to save students **over \$280,000 in course material fees**. (See **A Connecticut OER Success Story** – next page)

However, I must caution that adoption and development of these materials does come at a cost to support organizational efforts and faculty work. Because the details of the bill are as of yet undefined, estimating the cost relative to scope is difficult, and any fiscal burden at this time would be difficult to absorb by the CTDLC and the BOR. I am happy to be involved with any discussions around the issue of cost.

Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have.



A Connecticut OER Success Story

Open Education Resource Effort for Intermediate Algebra

Housatonic Community College (HCC) had been utilizing a commercial solution for its 6 credit Intermediate Algebra plus lab courses. The solution provided by Pearson listed for **\$300** and included a textbook and access to their MyMathLab software.

In the fall of 2014, HCC, led by Michael La Barbera and Marina Phillips, reviewed the Creative Commons licensed, OER work developed by **Scottsdale Community College** (AZ) and adapted this work to meet the needs of Connecticut students. By adapting an existing open licensed work, HCC saved countless staff and faculty hours from developing a completely new text. The cost for each student to access the open-source MathAS and MyOpenMath platforms is **\$30**.

To date, HCC has served **250** students through this program. Historically, these students would have paid a total of **\$75,000** to access the commercially developed materials. With the OER materials, students only spent a total of **\$7,500 – a \$67,500 savings**. Additionally, HCC reported that the students have experienced a success rate similar to what students realized with the commercial materials.

Looking forward, HCC plans to expand the usage of these OER materials beyond their pilot to reach over **800 students** on campus. The projected cost savings for this single course (multiple sections) is over **\$216,000** by utilizing low cost/no cost OER materials vs. commercial courseware.